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A portrait of Myriam Jansen-Verbeke

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Introduction

A new colleague made her entrance to the University of Leuven (KU Leuven, Belgium) in 1994. She had left the same KU Leuven decades earlier as a researcher and Ph.D. student and returned as a tenured professor specialized in urban geography and tourism. No tourism programme existed at KU Leuven at that time. As a specialist in urban geography, her position in the department and division was consolidated but more than one colleague questioned the suitability of tourism adjacent to physical geography and geology. Very soon it became clear that Myriam's vision had come to stay, on a local level (KU Leuven), on a regional level (the Flemish Council for Tourism and the Flemish Center for Tourism Policy Studies), as well as on an international level (as an elected member of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism (IAST) and as an esteemed author of a series of publications on urban, cultural, and heritage tourism). As I write, Myriam Jansen-Verbeke is Emeritus Professor at KU Leuven. It is tricky to estimate the legacy of a scholar. Myriam herself once wrote: "Why would my personal story in academics be of interest to anyone?" (2010a, p. 209). The answer is complex and simple at the same time ... because these kinds of scholars provide us with concepts, ideas, and reflections that continue to inspire.

Short biography

As Myriam once said: "my professional destiny in the field of tourism might have been written in the stars. I was born in Bruges, Belgium, a historical town inscribed on the UNESCO World heritage list in 2000 [and] a major tourism destination" (Jansen-Verbeke, 2010a, p. 210). Her university studies at the (Catholic) University of Leuven (Belgium) "Licencié in Geography" (now master) took 4 years (1961–1965) and this laid the foundations for her future research interest in urban geography. In the following years (1969–1971), Myriam moved abroad – not so common at that time, certainly not for a female researcher – to work with Professor Emrys Jones and Peter Hall, at the London School of Economics, on urban problems in a global perspective.

From 1975 till 1994, she was active as a researcher/lecturer in the department of Geography/Spatial Planning at the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands). There she was offered the opportunity to work on a *Ph.D. project* on the topic "Leisure, Recreation and Tourism in Historical Cities in the Netherlands" (1988). Ever since, planning issues of historical cities became the focus of her work.

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In the context of AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) of which she was an executive officer from 1989 until 1995, she became acquainted with urban planning departments in various European universities. At that time there were many incentives to study planning issues in tourism. The orientation of tourism studies towards destination development and place marketing became fashionable and was much in demand by local authorities. She carried out several urban studies in the Netherlands and Belgium, also in Melaka (Malaysia), Hanoi (Vietnam), Stellenbosch (SA), etc. Participation in workshops in Krakow and Lodz (Poland), discussing urban revitalization and the valorization of cultural resources, was an eye opener on eastern Europe with all its potentials and constraints.

Her membership of the *International Academy for the Study of Tourism* (IAST; since 1990) and her involvement with the editorial board of eight scientific journals for tourism, offered her a platform for the exchange of ideas, launching joint projects and creating a worldwide network of contacts and experts to collaborate with. This resulted also in a series of *guest-lectures* at various universities in Europe (Portugal, England, Scotland, Denmark, Poland, Spain, Germany, France, and Italy), Turkey (Istanbul), the USA (Menomonie), Canada (Waterloo), Vietnam (Hanoi), South Africa (Stellenbosch), Ecuador (Guayaquil), and China (Beijing).

From 1993 to 1996, Myriam was given the task of introducing *Tourism Management* at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Netherlands). The *endowed chair* – sponsored by BEWETOURL, a group of Dutch tourism and tourism-related companies and organizations – was intended to develop tourism as a scientific domain leading to a more professional entrepreneurship in the tourism business. The desire to achieve academic recognition of tourism studies and publications has been a driving force throughout this and the following phases of her university career.

In 1994, she was appointed *tenured Professor at the University of Leuven* (KU Leuven, Belgium), in the Geography Division, Faculty of Sciences. In that capacity, Myriam, together with three other colleagues, started lobbying in Flanders (politically and scientifically) to create an academic tourism degree, beyond the existing professional higher education in tourism. Her efforts succeeded in launching, in 2001, an interuniversity model for a postgraduate degree in tourism. In 2004, the postgraduate degree in tourism was remodelled in an independent master of tourism. Within this academic and research programme – coordinated by KU Leuven but organized and supported by four Flemish Universities and six University Colleges (Polytechnics with a professional Bachelor in tourism) – she was one of the leading professors, urging a whole generation of young professionals in tourism until she retired in 2009.

Surely this development also encouraged policy-makers and governmental organizations to call for scientific backing to their ambitious tourism plans, for data on economic impact to promote specific campaigns, and for marketing tools for local and regional branding. This resulted in a call for a *Centre for Tourism Policy Studies*. Myriam's response was quick and firm by writing a proposal which was honoured in 2002. She created this Centre for Tourism Policy Studies at the KU Leuven and was its coordinator until 2005. Although the dual ambition of long-term scientific and short-term applied research for policy purposes proved to be difficult, the *Centre for Tourism Policy Studies* has continued to exist for almost 10 years. Even after the financing by the Flemish government was stopped in 2011, the Centre continued to be an inspiration to its successor "ASTOR" (Association for Tourism Research) which was, and still is organized as a division of KU Leuven Research & Development.

Myriam's retirement in 2009 was the start of a very productive Indian Summer, the highlights being her appointment as a visiting professor at the Chinese Academy of Science (2011–2013) and her involvement in the World Heritage Tourism Research Network (WHTRN, since 2008), freed from the burden of administration and compulsory teaching.

Approach to research and selected publications

The 1980s were characterized by a growing awareness of the economic potential of tourism, its positive and negative impact on different types of location, and the need for local and national authorities to manage and monitor it. Despite this development, tourism was not yet regarded as a scientific field of research in its own right, or as a stakeholder in policy-making. In particular, the long established and traditional universities in western Europe were not really embracing this new specialization and profession. Therefore, Myriam combined urban geography, planning, and aspects of tourism and/or leisure. Her Ph.D. subject on leisure, recreation, and tourism in historical cities, together with the development of her network, produced a shift towards the further development of *urban tourism* as an academic subject (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994). Soon, she started defending the *territorial perspective* as an added value as well as the need for spatial integration and planning (Jansen-Verbeke, 1989, 1992; Jansen-Verbeke & Ashworth, 1990; Jansen-Verbeke & Dietvorst, 1987; Jansen-Verbeke & Van de Wiel, 1993, 1995). She broadened the scope of her studies into the field of *heritage management and cultural tourism*, focusing on the part that tourism plays in changing places and communities (Jansen-Verbeke, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2004). Finally, during recent years she focused on the *potential and valorization of cultural and heritage resources* in tandem with the study of sustainable tourism development models for heritage sites as competitive tourism destinations. As such, she was (and still is) looking for a *sound balance between conservation and tourism development and embeddedness in the landscape* (Jansen-Verbeke & Lievois, 1999; Jansen-Verbeke, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2013a; Jansen-Verbeke & McKercher, 2013; Jansen-Verbeke & George, 2013).

The geographical approach implies for her the development of *analytical tools to measure* and increase knowledge and insight into the (emerging) spatial patterns in and from tourism, but most of all to define *methods of identifying the factors of change* induced by tourism and its related activities (Jansen-Verbeke, 1998a, 2003; 2010b, 2013a, 2014; Jansen-Verbeke & Govers, 2009; Jansen-Verbeke, Vandenbroucke, & Tielen, 2005). This resulted in a spatial vision and approach paired with multi-disciplinarity and a growing holistic view on facts, processes, and dynamics. She tried to fuel understanding of the complexity of the tourism dynamics by analysing these processes through case studies, often linked with own experience through fieldwork. Her device:

We must map [literally] the tourist opportunity spectrum and the tourist flows, measure carrying capacity levels, and redefine the forces behind clustering... We need more information on comparative studies, more valid data, better maps and more information on the impact of human activities on the environment. These observations brought us back to the key issues of geographical and spatial aspects in tourism. (Jansen-Verbeke, conference "Progress in Tourism Studies", Leuven, April 23–24, 2009)

The quote below from the conference *Progress in Tourism Studies*, at the occasion of her retirement in April 2009 and organized in honour of Myriam's work and her significance for the research field of tourism in Belgium and beyond, summarizes her research focus in terms of subject and approach very well:

This trend [shift towards sustainability in heritage tourism studies] implies a “new” multidisciplinary field of research to be explored; new concepts and development models are emerging. The prime challenge is to design analytical tools to measure and eventually monitor the process of change induced by tourism on the site and in the region. So far there is a limited understanding of the dilemma’s and conflicts between conservation policies and tourism destination strategies, or about the erosion of authenticity and the multiple impacts on local communities and economies.

Many descriptive case studies are being produced, but hardly any comparative studies or attempts to define common problems and solutions. The search is out for variables characterizing the process of tourismification, taking into account the different types of heritage sites (in terms of location, situation, scale, complexity, vulnerability, uniqueness, etc). Clearly there will never be a blueprint for managing tourism on heritage sites. The presentation of selected examples of heritage tourism destinations will illustrate the collective responsibility of present decision makers and can open new perspectives for future research and interdisciplinary debate.

Myriam’s concern about matching conservation policies with tourism strategies for regional, local, and site development, explains her membership of the WHTRN (since 2008). Together with W. George, she initiated an international survey on the interpretation of the First World War heritage and its valorization for tourism among a global audience. The necessity of dealing with sensitive and even ethical issues related to war heritage on the one hand and tourism development on the other hand is illustrative for the reflection that goes into her most recent work.

Myriam’s international publications reflect the consistency of the spatial dimension on the one hand and the evolution in research content and approach on the other hand.

In an attempt to detect and label the different tendencies and topics handled in her work along with the shift in her approach to research, one could structure most of her publications as follows.

In the beginning, focus was on *touristification*, referring to the impact of tourists and tourists’ use of space, and planning (Jansen-Verbeke, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998b; Jansen-Verbeke & Spee, 1994; Jansen-Verbeke & Van Rekom, 1996). Effects of shopping facilities or festivities (1990, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2004) were researched by conducting fieldwork with large-scale surveys. Myriam was quick to detect conflicting space uses, especially in urban areas and the need for planning and integration of tourism in a broader context (Jansen-Verbeke, 1992; Jansen-Verbeke & Ashworth, 1990; Jansen-Verbeke & Dietvorst, 1987). The *topic of sustainability* followed naturally since Myriam is not only aware of tourism as a dynamic factor but also of the need of managing these trends (Jansen-Verbeke, 1993, 1997, 1999; Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). She brought this up at several conferences such as the Icomos Conference at Bath in 1995 (published in the conference proceedings), at that time being one of the pioneers on the issue.

More recently, she took a turn towards social and cultural cohesion embedded in a more holistic approach of the *place* while trying to read the landscape and to understand its dynamics. This gradual shift to what can be called “tourismification” (referring to the genesis of a system dominated by tourism) appears in 1998 and continues to set the scene all through her research output in the twenty-first century (2007, 2009, 2013, 2014). The development of the concept “tourismscape” comes along with it, first in a presentation on *Urban Tourismscapes: Research based destination management*, at the New Zealand Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference in Wellington in 2004 (published in the conference proceedings) and further developed later on.

The opportunity to participate in the *EU-ESPON1.3.3 project* (2004–2007) on spatial aspects of cultural heritage was a strong stimulus “to connect culture and tourism, both

rural and urban, ‘people, place and product’ in innovative ways” (Jansen-Verbeke, 2010a, p.219). Some key issues of this pan-European and interuniversity project were further addressed and elaborated in a co-edited book *Cultural Resources for Tourism; Patterns, Processes, Policies* (Jansen-Verbeke, Priestley, & Russo, 2008), with six co-authored chapters and translated into a Chinese edition by the Chinese Academy of Science (2010). It reflects how a lifetime of work on tourism culminates in sustainable development models for heritage sites. Her analytical model looking into the so called hardware–software–orgware dimensions has been welcomed as very useful and is applied by students in their further professional carriers as destination planners or site managers (Jansen-Verbeke, 2007; Jansen-Verbeke & McKercher, 2010). During the most recent years of her career, she provided us with a series of rather *reflexive publications on tourism landscapes* such as cultural landscapes (Jansen-Verbeke, 2013a), on war and memoryscapes (Jansen-Verbeke & George, 2013) or agricultural landscapes (Jansen-Verbeke & McKercher, 2013; Sun, Jansen-Verbeke, Min, & Cheng, 2011). For sure, in the years to come, other publications will be added to that list since she is recently very much involved in the cultural heritage of the First World War as well as borderscapes in war time.

Output: drawing up the balance

Let us first summarize Myriam’s legacy for local academia. For many years, there was no academic master programme in tourism in Flanders (autonomous, Dutch speaking northern part of Belgium). As a chair of the *Flemish Council for Tourism* (agency of the Flemish government), she created awareness among political actors about the need for such an academic programme, beyond professional higher education in tourism. She was the first, together with colleagues from the Universities of Antwerp and Hasselt, to match words with deeds by creating a postgraduate programme for tourism (2001–2004) which was the forerunner of a master of tourism at KU Leuven (since 2004). Following this development, a doctoral degree in Tourism came to existence a decade ago. In that time, the number of Ph.Ds in tourism was limited. Myriam supervised the first doctoral candidates on the dialectic relationship between urban dwellers and tourism space in their city (case Bruges) (2005) and on “touristicity” indicators and methods for interaction analysis (case Ghent) (2007). Junior collaborators, doing research at and for the *Centre for Tourism Policy Studies* which was founded and directed by Myriam, were motivated to start a doctoral research which was unusual since Flanders’ higher education in tourism is dominated by the professional rather than the academic perspective. Myriam supervised a large number of master theses on tourism within the programmes of Master in Geography (1994–2009) and Master of Tourism (2004–2009) as well as the postgraduate Tourism programme (2001–2004). As such she also took care of introducing the KU Leuven Master of Tourism within the UNESCO UNITWIN network related to the UNESCO chair “Culture, Tourism, Development”. This enabled KU Leuven not only to participate in an interesting tourism network but also to develop a module on (world) heritage and tourism development that is promoted internationally (refer website Paris1 – Panthéon – Sorbonne).

Second, what was Myriam’s gift to the international tourism community? In a self-reflection dating from 2010, Myriam wrote:

... I could only report a limited number of publications in my yearly assessment reports ... When working in a Dutch-Flemish-speaking environment, with an emphasis on applied research and a priority of research reports for sponsors (as a rule, written in their language) your paper production ends up being mainly for local consumption ... [and explains] why the

list of [my] publications in English cannot be compared with that of our Anglo-Saxon colleagues. (Jansen-Verbeke, 2010a, pp. 220–221)

First, is a comparison with scholars who are the icons of their department, who get full support as research professors and who are the gatekeepers of editorial boards of highly ranked international journals, applicable? What about 60 publications in English, partly in top journals and partly as chapters in peer-reviewed and internationally distributed books with highly respected editors? Her first publication in *Annals of Tourism Research* goes back as far as 1986, while many more followed in the same journal (1987, 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1998) as well as in *Tourism Management* (1991, 1996, 2011) or *Tourism Geographies* (1999, 2011), which does not exclude papers in other well-ranked journals.

Aside from contributions to journals and books, Myriam was and still is a respected speaker at conferences. She has been welcomed in many countries (the UK, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Hungary, Czech Republic, Turkey, Canada, the USA, Jordan, New Zealand, China, etc.) and for a multitude of international events ranging from annual meetings such as the Association Internationale D'Experts Scientifiques Du Tourisme/International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (Aiest) Congresses or International Geographical Union, Association of American Geographers, and European Regional Science Association meetings to specific, once-only conferences, announced and promoted by international networks such as Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and research (ATLAS). The approximately 40 contributions to conference proceedings add to her legacy, but could not be handled here; the same can be said of many further presentations.

Furthermore, Myriam's multilingualism allowed and still allows her to keep pace with the mass of publications and research reports in English and also in French and Dutch. Therefore, she has a broad view on the progress in tourism studies and some of her publications are even written in French and published in French journals such as the former *Hommes et Terres du Nord* (now: *Territoire en Mouvement*). Indeed, a large part of her work stays hidden for an international audience because papers and reports are written in her native language (Dutch, spoken in the northern part of Belgium) and/or published by local agencies. Nevertheless, some 50 papers and reports in Dutch have influenced young scholars during her classes in urban tourism, as well as professionals in tourism policy.

Due to the fact that KU Leuven does not make a distinction between research staff and educational staff members, Myriam had a full load of teaching and administrative duties. Nevertheless, she was able to participate or even take the lead in a series (16) of international projects in tourism from the earliest on Agritourism in Europe (1989), Tourism development plans in Vietnam (1992–1993), Cultural Tourism in Krakow (1993) to the most recent such as an EU project on Tourism Satellite Accounts (2003–2004), an European Observation Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON)-project on the role and spatial effects of cultural heritage and identity (2004–2007) or a project on policy management, governance and poverty alleviation, inclusive tourism, with the South African University of the Western Cape (2005–2009).

Beyond and parallel to these international projects, Myriam participated in, and mostly led, 24 local projects in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Although Myriam has now retired for several years, her output continues to grow and to inspire colleagues and students by combining presentations at conferences, visiting professorships and guest lectures, and a still steady growing output of papers. More contemplation has been involved in her recent work, such as her focus on “memoryscapes”.

Conclusion

The work of Myriam Jansen-Verbeke is characterized by its consistency in promoting the spatial perspective of tourism and the need to embed tourism in the ongoing regionalization and regional development dynamics. She never lost the firm determination “to do research and to prove that the world of tourism business could benefit from the use of geography and its principles” (Jansen-Verbeke, 2010a, p. 212). At the same time, she encouraged (and still does) an interdisciplinary approach as the engine behind debates and collaboration with anthropologists, archeologists, building experts specialized in the conservation of monuments and sites, planners, etc.

It should be said that Myriam is a role model for scholars in tourism, originating from a non-Anglophone and/or small country lacking a real tourism studies tradition. As one of the few prominent scholars in tourism in Belgium, she was able to contribute to tourism as an international academic field. It seems that her international reputation and network was needed for opening the eyes of peers to the importance and impact of tourism beyond the tourism industry. Of course, her membership of the IAST opened and still opens many doors. Her broad experience and contacts have always been at the benefit of her colleagues and junior staff, internationalizing not only her personal partnerships but also those of the educational and research group for Tourism at KU Leuven.

What we will remember is the fact that Myriam tried to find a balance between a grounded understanding of structures and processes and the firm will to provide us with tools for a sustainable (heritage) tourism development. Her hardware–software–orgware model is very accessible and applicable in many circumstances. Many graduates in tourism and in disciplines that offer tourism courses (such as the Erasmus Mundus Master in Sustainable Territorial Development) still use her materials in practice. She was able, as a geographer, to offer a framework and indicate variables that allow for critical reflection and recommendations at the local level.

Finally, maybe the wisdom of the age is provoking reflections on ethical questions in Myriam’s recent work. Only scholars with extended experience and exceptional skills to detect the less obvious connections, possibilities, and threats, such as Myriam Jansen-Verbeke, can provide us with this kind of awareness and sensitivity.

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